branches of SBI. The fraud relates to Baghbazar branch only.

Foreign Visits by Secretaries of various Ministries/Departments

1002. SHRI RAJNATH SINGH 'SURYA': Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) the number of foreign visits made by the Secretaries (except foreign Secretary) of various Department and Ministries during the last two years;

(b) the amount of money spent on each of these visits;

(c) whether Government propose to undertakes any study of these visits; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI YASHWANT SINHA): (a) and (b) Relevant information is not centrally available, it is being collected from all the Ministries and Departments. This will be laid on the Table of the House as early as possible.

(c) and (d) Foreign visits of Secretaries to Government are approved only after careful scrutiny and assessment by a Screening Committee of Secretaries, presided over by the Cabinet Secretary. In approving such visits, the Committee takes into account the need and justification therefor, the benefits likely to accrue, the financial implications, etc. Approval of the concerned Minister is also a prerequisite. On return from the foreign visits, the officers are required to submit a report to the Minister and Cabinet Secretary to facilitate an evaluation of the outcome of these visits and their impact. The existing arrangements in this regard are considered to be adequate.

Simplification of Customs and Excise Operations

1003. DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) the action taken/proposed to be taken by Government to simplify the customs and excise operations to effect single window clearance;

(b) whether any specific guidelines being issued to deal genuine exporter/ importer more promptly and more positively then ordinary offenders;

(c) if so, the details thereof, and action taken to train and motivate the field officers towards helping country's export earnings? and

(d) the action taken to strengthen the staff pattern, technical efficiency, system modernisation in the present day context?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (BANKING, REVENUE AND INSURANCE) (SHRI KADAMBUR M. R. JANAR-THANAN): (a) So far as the Customs operations are concerned, Department's interaction with exporters/importers is at the point of import of goods/ manufacture of goods and clearance of goods from the country. The import and manufacture take place without payment of duty under various export 'promotion schemes. The examination of the said goods are required to be made for the purpose of testing the composition of export goods and other conditions of the notifications. To reduce multiple checking, the officers of Central Excise have also been declared as officers of Customs under Section 4 of the Customs Act, 1962 so that they can also perform other functions.

Further, in this regard the following actions have also been taken in respect of Customs Work such as:—

(i) In view of the downturn in exports, field formations have been directed to avoid delay in payment of drawback and carry out periodical review of pendencies.

(ii) Provision of Rule 12(l)(a) of the Duties of Drawback Rules, 1995 further simplified to expedite speedy disposal of Drawback claims by delegating powers to the Commissioners of Customs for